

**The Toolbox System (TS):
Thesis on the potential to foster self-awareness
and other-awareness using Semiotics**

Mithzay De La Espriella
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Declaration

I, declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

Signed:

Full name: Mithzay De La Espriella

Student number: 30433364

Date: November 9, 2012

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Author: Mithzay De La Espriella

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Abstract

Based on the increasing demand for resources to enhance self-esteem, the Toolbox System (TS) is a framework of tools devised to foster the development of self-awareness and other-awareness in its users. This thesis presents my research on and conceptualisation of the TS. It proposes the use of Semiotics and recursion as tools to manage concepts of awareness. The use of Semiotics involves, but is not limited to, the analysis of texts such as photos, videos, artworks, and the like. This creates a context that allows the users to engage in inductive, deductive, and abductive reasoning. The aim is for users to gain clarity about their values and convictions, using tools to evaluate worldviews and establish meaning. This triggers a process of cultivation, which can potentially lead to self-actualisation and the development of empathy. The process of cultivation refers to Simmel's thoughts on culture. For the purposes of the thesis, cultivation is considered key in the development of the individual's sense of identity and purpose, thus impacting culture. The tools that could be included in the TS are not limited. While the TS uses semiotic concepts and techniques, the toolbox may contain other tools from various disciplines. The thesis refers to tool samples drawn from theories and research on individual needs, values and motivation, and self-perception among others. Although referring to various disciplines, the TS is designed to introduce the use of Semiotics in the area of self-development, making a significant contribution to both fields.

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Glossary

meaning:

“A kind of weighted average of the various ‘meanings’ attached to a concept over time” (Van Osselaer 2001, 12). It is connected to *temporal* processes, emerging via a kind of ‘journey’ made by the subject (Tarasti 2000, 18).

According to Minski

What people call ‘meanings’ do not usually correspond to particular and definite structures, but to connections among and across fragments of the great interlocking networks of connections and constraints among our agencies (Cited in Van Osselaer 2001, 3).

Semiotics:

The study of signs, and sign systems. Also known as *Semiology*; as defined by Saussure: “a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life” (1974, 16). Sign systems may include words, pictures, photos, art, drawings, sounds, body language, and objects. In the TS, Semiotics is used as a method for the systematic study of signs and the processes that represent meanings.

text:

For the purposes of the thesis, text refers to re-presentations of life included in books, film, video, audio recordings, photographs, cartoons, art, and the like.

tools:

Refers to the resources and paradigms available to the user. In the TS the tools are classified into formal tools and material tools in reference to Heidegger’s concept of causality (1977, 6). However, the tools are not limited to the

categories expressed in the thesis, but rather the tool and its category are determined in the moment by the user. “Wherever ends are pursued and means are employed, wherever instrumentality reigns, there reigns causality” (Ibid).

The TS recycles existing techniques and methods, such as abstract concepts, theories, social constructions and codes, to be used as tools. The tools that appear in the TS Thesis are samples of the possibilities of the toolbox contents.

TS or Toolbox System:

A system containing tools used to examine scenarios created by the semiotic analysis of re-presentations of life. The system is developed with the final purpose of increasing its user’s self-awareness and other-awareness, in order to foster self-actualisation and empathy.

TS Thesis:

Refers to the proposal, research and sample, provided in this document, to substantiate the design of the TS. The TS Thesis has two versions of the sample: an electronic copy and, a hard copy containing the materials used in the samples.

Preface

The initial research for the Toolbox System (TS) was prompted by the identification of an increasing need to generate resources to enhance self-esteem for young people in Australia (Mission Australia Youth Survey 2011, 2012). However, as the research evolved, it became apparent that the TS could be highly adaptable to its users and thus a wide variety of individuals of all ages could take advantage of it. Therefore, I no longer feel compelled to see it as a program designed exclusively for youth.

The TS was designed to assist its users in the development of self-awareness and other-awareness, in order to foster self-actualization and empathy. For the purposes of the thesis, the use of the term 'self-actualisation' will be understood according to Maslow's treatment of the concept in his works (1943; 1968; 1970). Maslow defines it, in line with Kurt Goldstein, as "the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (1943, 382). The scope of this thesis only allows for an outline highlighting the potential of the TS to foster self-awareness and other-awareness. The thesis represents a sketch for the design of the TS, focusing on a description of its purpose, tool selection rationale and methodology. Contained in the TS Thesis are two samples of the TS, which include a handful of tools presented as illustrations of the TS potential. There is no tangible limit to the tools that can be included.

Introduction

The TS is a resource that introduces its users to theories, concepts and strategies [as tools] to help them become aware of their convictions through their interpretations of actuality. Fields such as Psychology, Education, Sociology and Community Development influenced the selection of tools, methodology and design of the TS content as presented in this thesis. Additionally, the TS draws on theories in Communications and Semiotics. These theories influenced the choice to use semiotic analysis, bricolage, and media literacy as tools to analyse photos, videos, art, cartoons and the like. These tools are used to assist the users in the identification of worldviews and the development of interpretative and communicative skills, while the representations of life provide the context for the trial of the additional tools that form part of the TS.

Assumptions

The TS Thesis is grounded in a set of assumptions. These assumptions cover two areas of relevance associated with the purpose of the TS. They include the communication process and the cultivation process.

In regards to the communication process, the first assumption is that life presents itself as a text to be read. This is based on the notion that the actuality of individuals is derived from their interpretations of signs. The term actuality is preferred over reality. It refers to the perception of the current state of affairs, based on an individual's personal interpretation of the facts available to them as signs. The use of the term is related to Aristotle's thoughts on potentiality and actuality.

[W]e exist in activity, since we exist by living and doing; and in a sense one who has made something exists actively, and so he loves his handiwork because he loves existence. This is in fact a fundamental principle of nature: what a thing is potentially, that its work reveals in actuality (Aristotle 1934, 9.7).

Second, Semiotics allows for the logical analysis of texts. Everything external to the individual has the potential to be a sign, but it does not become a sign unless, or until, the individual gives it meaning. As Peirce declares: “Nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign” (Cited in Chandler 2009, par 1). Consequently, if we accept that life is a text, we can infer that Semiotics will be a useful method to analyse actuality as well as re-presentations of life. By re-presentations of life, I refer to the types of texts that are produced to re-petition presentations of life, such as photos, videos and the like.

In line with the previous assumption, is another supported by the idea that the re-presentations reflect worldviews that exist within cultures. As defined by the Oxford Dictionary, a ‘worldview’ is a system of beliefs used to arrange concepts and ideas about the world we live in. From the German, *Welt* ‘world’ + *Anschauung* ‘perception’. Worldviews influence individuals’ perceptions, thoughts and actions. Therefore, the semiotic analysis of the re-presentations can highlight worldview patterns, allowing users to identify their own convictions and those of others.

The third assumption is that we derive sense and meaning in a recursive process, where we draw upon past interpretations to make sense of our perceptions in the moment. This recursive process is key to the effectiveness of the TS.

The fourth assumption is that complexure is a suitable framework to use for the purposes of the TS. Complexure refers to the dynamic process involving the emergence of meanings through recursive readings (Van Osselaer 2001, 7). The term results from the combination of “complexity” and “culture” (Ibid, 3). The Complexure text is a tool designed to investigate how interference with reference supports sense (Ibid, 4). It enables recursion and feedback, facilitating the analysis of texts, as well as the introduction and implementation of tools in the moment of emergence of sense.

Finally, the fifth assumption is based on the previous four. Namely: that by developing self-awareness and other-awareness, the TS will trigger in the users a process of 'cultivation' that could potentially lead to self-actualization and the development of empathy (Simmel 2000). Potentially, this could be achieved through the recursive use of semiotic analysis in combination with the TS tools. In addition, the use of semiotic analysis can facilitate the development of interpretative skills and media literacy. These skills, in turn, foster the development of critical and creative thinking skills, enabling the understanding of the contextual potential of the tools included in the TS.

Warnings

The TS is by no means a behaviour guide, nor does it prescribe tools. Instead, it acts as a source of potential tools, made available for trial, some of which have been used before in similar contexts. It is the users who determine the tool's usefulness and applicability, fine-tuning their use of the tools recursively. I anticipate users will develop their own convictions and strategies regarding the usefulness of the tools.

The TS aims to trigger a process of cultivation by causing the users to focus and carefully consider their worldviews and convictions. However, the pursuit of this cultivation process is the onus of each individual. The process of cultivation is described ahead.

Purposive Danger

In Semiotics "a paradigm is a set of associated signifiers or signifieds which are all members of some defining category, but in which each is significantly different" (Chandler 2002, par 3). The TS is designed to enable users to explore existing frameworks or paradigms. However, by providing the tools, I do not intend to organise an individual's thoughts as a systematic classification of who they are. In such a case, the mysteriousness of the individual's essence, the cultivation of which the TS aims to trigger, could fade into the background. The implication is that the TS would not fulfil its purpose. However, if there is such a

risk, it is superseded by the potential that lies in the awareness and self-development the TS proposes.

Theoretical Background

The research for the development of the TS had a twofold focus: First, the selection of theories to inform content, in order to assist in the selection of tools and focus of communication; second, the selection of theories to inform the communication process.

TS Tool Content

From the onset, the purpose and nature of the TS design required a multidisciplinary approach to the research for the tools. Several theories were considered including theories of self (Maslow, Higgins), values and motivation (Maslow, Schwartz, Welzel and Inglehart, J. Hoffman, Pink), development and education (Freire, Illich, Piaget, Vygotsky, Montessori, Erikson, among others), cognition (Chaiken), and empathic and systematic processing of information (Baron-Cohen).

In addressing the main purpose of the TS, the research led to the identification of a thematic thread between theories. This thematic thread served as an outline, indicating possible tools with the potential to achieve the desired outcome. For example, consideration of Maslow's theories, specifically the 'hierarchy of needs' and 'being and becoming', helped identify self-actualization as a central goal, the quest for which could be triggered with the use of the TS (1968; 1970). The hierarchy of needs theory suggests individuals are driven to satisfy the lower needs [basic biological, safety needs] and drawn to meet the higher ones [self-actualization, transcendence]. This realisation led to consider theories of motivation, such as Schwartz's Basic Human Values (1996; 2006; 2009). The objective was to develop a systematic approach that would enable the identification of the values/needs relationship within different contexts.

Schwartz's Basic Values theory provided a framework for understanding how motivations inform values, and how these, in turn, give coherence to our purpose and goal choices (2006). Thus, it became clear that this set of tools could serve to develop the users' clarity and awareness about motivations and values, so that individuals could identify and determine their principles, personal qualities and purpose. The later become a framework for action which, when acted upon, constitute the individual's ethics and character. Additionally, this framework becomes a useful tool for goal setting.

Maslow points out that self-actualisation needs [quest for knowledge, life philosophy, theoretical frames of reference and value systems] are affected by culture and actuality, siding with John Dewey to conclude that cognition [the capacity to process information, apply knowledge and adjust preferences] of actuality plays a significant role, not only in the development of those needs, but also in the impulse for action and change they generate (Maslow 1970, 59). This led to the identification of agency, also anchored in the human motivational system, as a key to human development (Welzel and Inglehart 2010, 44). In combination, the theories of Schwartz and Maslow provided a broader understanding of the type of tools individuals could find useful, to make sense of their actuality, in their pursuit of higher needs.

The role of agency in human development led to further research into the key motivational aspects that enable it. The research led to the theories exposed by Daniel Pink (2009). Pink's theory, applied to business management in his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*, identifies three key aspects linking motivation to agency, which Pink refers to as 'drive' (Ibid). These are: autonomy, mastery and purpose. Despite its managerial focus, the fundamentals of the drive theory aligned with and complemented the research so far conducted for the TS. It indicated a need to cater for the development of autonomy, mastery and purpose of the TS users. Furthermore, the development of these should be embedded in the TS, both through the tools made available to the users, as well as through the communication process used to deliver the TS

content. The details of the later will be addressed in the TS communication section.

Maslow's indication that self-actualization needs are affected by culture and actuality, led the research in two directions. First, towards understanding an individual's self-perception in relation to their interpretation of actuality, and second, understanding the relationship between self-perception, culture, and the potential for self-actualization.

Self-perception and Others

In regards to the first direction of the research, Higgins' Self-discrepancy theory proved to be a useful starting point. He identifies three basic domains of the self:

(a) [T]he actual self, which is your representation of the attributes that someone [yourself or another] believes you actually possess; (b) the ideal self, which is your representation of the attributes that someone [yourself or another] would like you, ideally, to possess [i.e., a representation of someone's hopes, aspirations, or wishes for you]; and (c) the ought self, which is your representation of the attributes that someone [yourself or another] believes you should or ought to possess [i.e., a representation of someone's sense of your duty, obligations, or responsibilities] (1987, 320-321).

These domains of the self (actual; ideal; ought), in addition to standpoints on the self (own; others), constitute an individual's 'self-state representation' (Ibid, 319). Research indicates that discrepancies between self-representations can have negative effects on individual's health and wellbeing (Strauman et al. 1993; Higgins et al. 1986; Forston and Stanton 1992; Strauman et al. 1991). This is caused by negative self-evaluation. On the other hand, research indicates that self-evaluation and self-enhancement can have a positive effect (Steele cited in Dowling 2003, 1; Taylor and Brown cited in Ibid).

An individual's evaluative standards [ideal and ought] are influenced by cultural codes, which affect their self-perception and self-representation (Strauman et al. 1991, 946). Codes refer to the systematic organization of signs, whose meanings are determined in part by their relationships to other signs within a given context. Examples might be the arrangement of furniture in a room, the rules of

a game, or conventional manners of behaviour (Gaines 2010, 156). In other words, codes provide a framework for sense making. “Whilst Saussure dealt only with the overall code of language, he did of course stress that signs are not meaningful in isolation, but only when they are interpreted in relation to each other” (Chandler 2001, par 3). Thus, the TS could provide tools for self-assessment as well as tools to objectively evaluate the cultural codes individuals are exposed to, such as social constructs, beliefs, and mythologies. These tools could be tested using scenarios created by the semiotic analysis of representations. On that account, the TS could use semiotic tools to develop media literacy as well as critical and creative thinking skills, which could further assist the user in their self-evaluation process. I will return to that later.

Additionally, the concept of moderation would need to play a key role in the TS as a whole. As we will see in the next section, an individual should not completely alienate themselves from the culture that surrounds them, for this too would have a negative effect on their wellbeing.

Cultivation

In relation to the second direction, addressing the relationship between self-perception, culture, and the potential development of self-actualization, the research led to the concept of cultivation. Here, I refer to the term in line with Simmel’s thoughts on culture (2000, 56). It is understood as a holistic growth of the individual, from their essence, to their self-characterisation in relation to others. It includes knowledge [information], capacity [ability and skills], understanding [sense and meaning], and purpose. In Simmel’s words:

Cultivation is the development of some entity beyond the form attainable by natural processes. It is development in accordance with an original inner essence, the perfection of an entity, in terms of its own significance, its most profound impulse (2000, 41).

Implied within this concept, is the understanding that an individual’s development of identity is based on the interactive relationship between the individual’s essence, their purpose, and their expression of the former. The

process then shapes the essence through self-perception. This 'objectification of the subject and the subjectification of the object' is part of a recursive loop that constitutes the nature of culture (Simmel 2000, 58).

One way to explain it is to say that an individual's identity has a dual constitution:

Internal identity

Essence: what it can be intrinsically; existentially;

Potential to be-come: purpose.

External identity

Projecting: self-perception and self-characterisation.

The external is related to the ways in which individuals project themselves, or present themselves. It involves the objective presentation of the essence, the manifestation of existence.

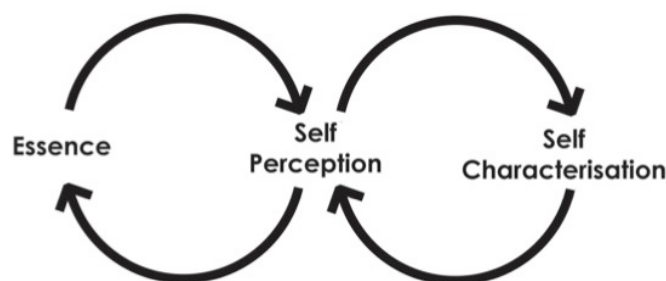


Figure 1. Self-perception/Self-characterisation Feedback.

Graphics: Anthea Court 2012.

Individuals have a capacity to self-perceive and self-characterise. I understand characterisation refers to the manifestation of the potential to be-come, which is based on the nature of the essence. Self-perception refers to an individual's ability to self-reflect. This links the characterisation back to the essence through reflection; it is a form of feedback. But it also links the essence with the characterisation [see Figure 1].

Using Simmel's tree analogy, let's consider the example of a fig tree (Simmel 200, 57). The nature of the tree, its essence, is that of 'fig tree'. It has the potential to produce figs, thus its purpose is intrinsic to its essence. When the tree produces figs, these figs are the characterisation of the fig tree, the manifestation of the potential of its being or essence. The figs come about through the cultivation of the tree. Similarly,

Whatever can be attained by the development of the soul is already present in its state [the individual's] at any time, as a feeling of urgency, as some invisible inner pattern. Even if its content is actualised only in a vague, fragmentary way, it is, for all that, a positive feeling of direction. Full development, as destiny and as capacity, is inseparably bound up with the existence of the human soul. It alone possesses the potential for development towards goals that are exclusively inherent in the teleology of its own being. However, it too cannot attain these goals purely through that growth from within which we call natural growth, but beyond a certain point it requires a technique, a procedure directed by the will (Simmel 2000, 42).

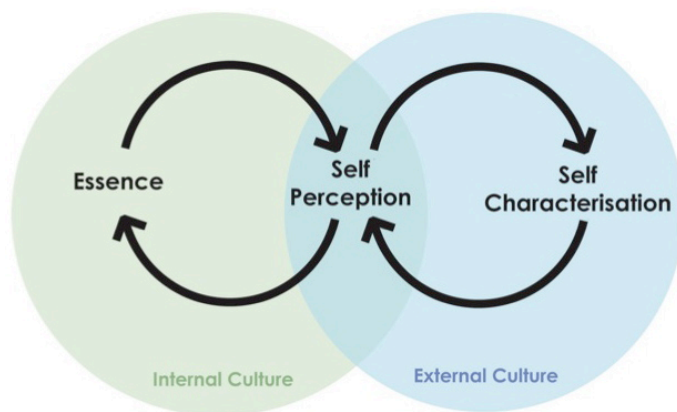


Figure 2. Culture and the Self-perception/Self-characterisation Feedback.
Graphics: Anthea Court 2012.

In this sense, we make culture, but it is also true that culture makes us. Culture comes into being by the coincidence of two elements, the subjective soul and the objective intellectual product (Simmel 2000, 58). The subjective soul is the essence; self-perception and self-characterisation are part of the objective intellectual product. What we perceive as culture is the result of self-characterisations. Our perception of these, influence how we perceive ourselves,

and this in turn, influences how we self-characterise. It is a recursive feedback loop. “We are the only things that can make the things that also make us” (McHoul 1998, 7).

To explain my point, allow me to digress for a moment. Let us consider the composition in Image 3. In the first section of the image we see the twitter® logo breaking through, as if cracking open a surface to reveal itself. We recognise the letter ‘t’ surrounded in blue as the logo for twitter®. Commonly, the company also uses a cartoon representation of a blue bird in conjunction with the ‘t’. In this instance, the cracking open to reveal the logo, not only evokes the bursting introduction of twitter®, but also, its birth by analogy to the cracking open of an egg. There is a yellow arrow indicating a movement from the birth of twitter® to a group of blue birds of different shapes and sizes, wearing distinct hairstyles and individual fashions.

(Image removed pending Copyright authorisation)

Figure 3. Twitter® Culture.

Images: reignofgaming.net, 2012; business2community.com, 2012.

For all intents, ‘tweeting’ is a sound made by birds. In this sense, it refers to the short intermittent chirping sounds that birds make. Since the introduction of twitter® it has also come to refer to the constant voicing of brief comments on social media. The cartoon birds express inclusiveness and individuality. All types of individuals can integrate into the twitter® culture, as it allows for individual expressions of identity. These in turn, serve to identify the social network. The objective here is not to determine which occurred first, but rather highlight the feedback loop characteristic of the process.

I believe conviction and conscience [unique human qualities], reside within this back-and-forth feedback enabled by self-perception. Unfortunately, the scope of this thesis does not allow me to explore that further. However, if we hold this to be true, then it stands to reason that self-awareness, along with clarity about values, motivations and needs, are extremely important to foster in order to avoid culture consumption. The meaning of this term becomes clear ahead.

The Cultivation Process

The TS intends to trigger the cultivation of its users using tools, both through the content as well as the communication process. I do not mean, however, for the tools to simply impart knowledge as information, or skills to the users. The notion of cultivation refers to a deeper development of the self that is tied up with culture in relation to an individual's purpose. Simmel states in *Simmel and Culture*:

We are not cultivated simply because we have formed this or that individual item of knowledge or ability within ourselves, but only if all those things serve the development of that psychological centrality which is connected to culture but does not coincide with it. Our conscious and specifiable efforts are aimed at particular interests and potentialities, and this is why the development of every person, *viewed according to that which can be named in them*, is a bundle of lines of growth that extend in quite different directions and with quite different lengths. However, it is not all these, with their individual perfections, which make a person cultivated, but only their *significance* for or their development of the individual's *indefinable personal unity* (Simmel 2000, 56)[Italics mine].

Cultivation is closely related to culture and implies growth. Simmel further explains:

The specific meaning of culture is thus fulfilled only where a person adds something external to that development, where the path of the soul leads through values and scales that are not themselves subjectively psychological. (...) [A]rt and morality, science and practical objects, religion and the law, technology and social norms – are stations through which the human subject must pass in order to acquire the specific personal value known as its culture. Individuals must include *these* constructs and constraints within themselves, but they must really include them within the individual *self* and not simply allow them to continue to exist as objective values (Simmel 2000, 57)[Italics in original].

In other words, cultivation, the development of an individual's internal and external culture, requires personal conviction [certainty and assurance]. "The thing to do, seems to be to find out what you are really like inside, deep down, as a member of the human species and as a particular individual", in order to determine potential and purpose (Maslow 1968, 15).

I refer to conviction as a firmly held belief, which influences choices, decisions, and behaviour. The TS proposes that awareness and understanding strengthen conviction, providing clarity about personal values and worldviews. This enhances the capacity for individuals to evaluate the connections between the later and the culture that surrounds them. Maslow believed an individual's 'inner nature' could be overshadowed and easily overcome by habit, cultural pressure and wrong attitudes (1968, 14). Therefore, the individual must be actively involved in their own cultivation and that of others; otherwise, they are at risk of simply consuming culture. That is, moving from one set of constructs to another, guided by impulse, fashion or fear of isolation; like a shell tossed back and forth by the waves on the shore.

Authenticity

Authenticity is often confused with an idealistic notion of originality, which demands a revolt against social convention and moral order (Anton 2001, 6). Examples include fashions such Punk, Emo, et cetera. Corey Anton in *Selfhood and Authenticity* states:

The culture of authenticity, I maintain, does reflect in part an ethical aspiration, but one which demands an effective safeguard against the self-defeating ego-centered [sic] varieties. Therefore, authenticity, as a quest for self-fulfilment, requires or demands an adequate comprehension of the selfhood that is to be fulfilled (2001, 8).

An 'ethical aspiration' implies some sort of code. Anton is highlighting that this code must act as a 'safeguard' against exclusively self-centred codes, because these are self-defeating. Thus, he presents a conceptualisation of authenticity that stands in contrast to the commonly held idealistic notion of originality referred to above (Ibid, 6). In this conceptualisation, the acts of individual

originality are set against a 'backdrop of significance' and 'traditions', against which, actions make sense (Anton 2001, 7). This backdrop relates to the external context of our shared lives, what we have defined above as external culture. Charles Taylor called it the 'horizon of significance' (Cited in Anton 2001, 7); Corey Anton unpacks the idea, citing Taylor (Anton 2001, 7)

This communal backdrop implies that choice for the sake of choice is not a defensible position. People must reckon with a horizon of 'important questions' if they, in seeking significance in life, are to define themselves meaningfully (...) To review what is at stake here, let me rehearse Taylor's important distinction between the necessarily self-referential orientation of authenticity and the actual content of the pursuit of authenticity, which need not be self-referential. He argues that,

Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order matters critically, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial. Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands (1991, 40-41).

In the quest for defining an identity, Taylor refers to the connection, between the demands [values and needs] of the individual and the demands of those around them, which is key to self-actualization and the development of empathy (Maslow 1970, 130, 138). Acceptance, deeper and more profound interpersonal relationships, humility and respect for others, as well as a deep feeling of identification with others, are all characteristics of self-actualised people (Ibid, 132-140). In relation to this, it became apparent that the TS should, not only foster the process of cultivation in its users, but also set a backdrop for understanding others contextually.

From the research conducted to determine the TS content, I arrived at two conclusions. First, whatever resource was to be designed should include tools to foster awareness at three levels: individual, social, and transcendent. This would be to foster self-actualisation, cultivation, and the development of purpose and empathy. The TS should offer users the means to consider their views, and those of others, in order to contextually determine their internal and external culture, as a process of defining their identity. Furthermore, it should enable them to discover their purpose, which is related to their inner essence, and evaluate it in relation to others.

Second, the possibilities of tools that could be included in the TS to achieve its purpose were not limited. Thus, the design should be flexible in order to adapt to the demands and needs of the users, both in terms of the potential use of tools and their combinations, as well as in the capacity to expand, contract, and diversify tool content.

TS Communication Strategy

Each technological revolution has brought about changes in the existing communication models of its time (Rifkin 2010; Stock 2012). For example, the communication-receiver model belongs to the era of scripted messages, which originated in the industrial revolution and intensified during the electronic era. These messages scripted our experiences pointing towards the desired 'new thing' [object of consumption, product, lifestyle, trend, culture] (Stock 2012). Messages could be controlled because the audience's perception could be captured at a static moment of focus. Scripts held an individual's attention captive, clearly outlining desired end-point perceptions. However, the present era of cyber-technology is characterised by networking, and by its very nature, demands a more participatory and collaborative approach to communication.

Originally, the TS was conceived as a linear presentation, within a communicator-receiver model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). In this scenario, an instructor would use the TS to deliver the content to the users. However, from a sociological and community development perspective, I found this model of the expert delivering knowledge, counterproductive to the purposes of the TS (Tesoriero 2010, 122). I anticipated it would establish a dominant relationship, limiting the user's freedom to explore their perceptions of actuality. Additionally, it would hinder communication feedback, which is key to culture development and identity. For this reason, I decided to change the communication mode to a forum, stopping the presentation for discussions at pre-determined points. I did this, in order to foster a more participatory or

transactional model of communication (Barnlund 2008). However, the discussions remained restricted to the pre-established flow of the presentation. Therefore, I remained concerned over the linearity. Linearity meant rigidity, and I wanted the users to remain engaged by being able to decide, in the moment and from a variety of options, what the next link would be, much in the same way the Internet is navigated. I aimed to encourage the autonomy of the TS users.

In this computer and cyber-dominated era, individuals are multitasking, navigating and generating a constant flux of data. This data represents identities through shared and distributed 'cultural signatures' (Stock 2012). Communication in this network era is based on the bricolage of this cultural data. The flux itself fuels a transformative Diaspora of ideas and culture, in which meaning migrates (Stock 2012).

In relation to the TS, rather than creating a freeze-frame of focus to deliver a script, we must communicate by developing a mindful focus that persists during data flux. This 'mindful focus' is defined by reference to the concept of mindfulness, which is "a sustained, receptive attention to and awareness of events and experiences as they occur" (Brown and Ryan cited in Kiken and Shook 2011, 425). "It involves a regulation of attention and awareness towards present-moment experiences" (Kiken and Shook 2011, 425).

Additionally, the TS would have to make provisions for users to interpret and re-interpret the tools in different contexts. Thus, in order for the TS to be effective, the purpose of the toolbox, the development of self-awareness and other-awareness, should be embedded as a recursive message. This implied the use of Semiotics, not just as an interpretation tool, but also as a tool for recursive communication.

Communication is always a semiotic process involving signs form a sender, or that exist in nature, that represent meanings to a receiver, who perceives and interprets them (Gaines 2010, 161). Sign systems may include words, pictures, photos, art, drawings, sounds, body language, and objects. In the TS Semiotics

would also be used as a method for the systematic study of signs and the processes that represent meanings.

In the final stages of the research for the TS, I came across Van Osselaer's Complexure thesis (2001). I was looking for a strategic mode of representation that would maximise the potential for recursions. Complexure offered, within a model of recursive reading, the flexibility, interaction and user autonomy I was after.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will provide an electronic copy of the TS sample, using Prezi as test tool. I chose Prezi as a presentation program because it gives movement and flow to the material presented, thus somewhat reflecting the desired dynamism. Unfortunately, the samples included in the thesis could not be fully developed to the desired dynamic, interactive and scalable format, due to the time constraints and scope of the thesis. Additionally, there are compatibility issues between Prezi and the Complexure model. In preparing the samples for the thesis, the need for further research and design leading to a unique TS presentation program became evident. Such investigation could even lead to a presentation program that would enable the insertion of user contributions.

The Use of Semiotics

Peirce declares: 'A sign is something by knowing which we know something more' (cited in Eco 1990, 28). Words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts or objects have the potential to be signs. However, they only become signs when we invest them with meaning. Anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as 'signifying' something, referring to or standing for, something other than itself (Chandler 2009, par 1).

What the sign refers to (referent), is defined in terms of an abstract entity, which is only a cultural convention (Eco 1979, 66). "Things are only known through cultural units which the universe of communication put into circulation

in place of things” (Ibid). From this perspective, as Eco states, Semiotics is mainly concerned with signs as social forces (1979, 65). In every culture “a unit (...) is simply anything that is culturally defined and distinguished as an entity. It may be a person, place, thing, feeling, state of affairs, sense of foreboding, fantasy, hallucination, hope or idea” (Schneider cited in Eco 1979, 67). Combinations of cultural units form worldviews. The TS aims to broaden the individual’s knowledge of cultural units available for interpretation.

Authors of developmental theories and progressive theories of education such as Dewey, Piaget, Montessori and Vygotsky, indicate that the construction of knowledge and understanding is maximised through interactions with the surroundings and finding solutions to real life events (Cited in Mooney 2006, 4). It is better to construct actuality than to instruct individuals about it; inquiry and search for answers should be nurtured and supported (Hendrick in Mooney 2006, 61: Piaget in Ibid, 62). This distinction is precisely what the TS focuses on. It is not just about presenting the content tools as knowledge about actuality, as mentioned above, but rather creating a contextual perception, as a scenario, which the individual can analyse and use to test the tools.

In order to broaden the user’s capacity for interpretation, the TS creates contexts through the semiotic analysis of texts. It uses semiotic analysis tools, including paradigmatic/syntagmatic, diachronic-synchronic, deconstruction and other semiotic concepts, especially as outlined by Derrida (1967) and Van Osselaer (2001). These analyses create scenarios for the individual to apply the content tools contextually.

The use of the semiotic tools in combination with other tools can help users gain some clarity about their understandings and convictions. Potentially, users would be able to evaluate, at a deeper level, the significance of the messages they come across. For example, using tools to assess values and motivations, individuals can identify worldviews and determine their position in relation to them, increasing self-awareness. The tools would also enable them to make sense of other’s worldviews, developing other-awareness. This awareness then,

becomes part of the feedback the TS provides 'to and with the moment', in a very individualised manner (Van Osselaer 2001, 2).

A Triadic Model of Inference

The methodology described above fosters the reflective use of abduction, which allows the individual to resolve issues of meaning (Ross & Shank 1993, 8).

Deduction, induction and abduction belong to Peirce's triadic model of inference [see image](Ross & Shank 1993, 7).

(F)or Peirce abduction had its proper place in the context of discovery, the stage of inquiry in which we try to generate theories which may then later be assessed. As he says, '[a]bduction is the process of forming explanatory hypotheses. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea' (CP 5.172); elsewhere he says that abduction encompasses 'all the operations by which theories and conceptions are engendered' (CP 5.590). Deduction and induction, then, come into play at the later stage of theory assessment: deduction helps to derive testable consequences from the explanatory hypotheses that abduction has helped us to conceive, and induction finally helps us to reach a verdict on the hypotheses, where the nature of the verdict is dependent on the number of testable consequences that have been verified (Douven 2011, par 1).

The distinctions between these modes of inference can be explained with the following examples adapted from Ross & Shank (Ibid):

Deduction: if the premises are true, the claims can be made with certainty.

Rule: All the chocolates in this box have almonds.

Case: This chocolate is from the box.

Result: This chocolate most certainly has almonds.

Induction: from experience and observation toward a rule that is *probably* true.

Result: This chocolate has almonds.

Case: This chocolate is from the box.

Rule: All the chocolates in the box probably have almonds.

Abduction: from an observation, a possible case or rule.

Result: This chocolate has almonds.

Rule: All the chocolates in this box have almonds.

Case: This chocolate is possibly from the box.

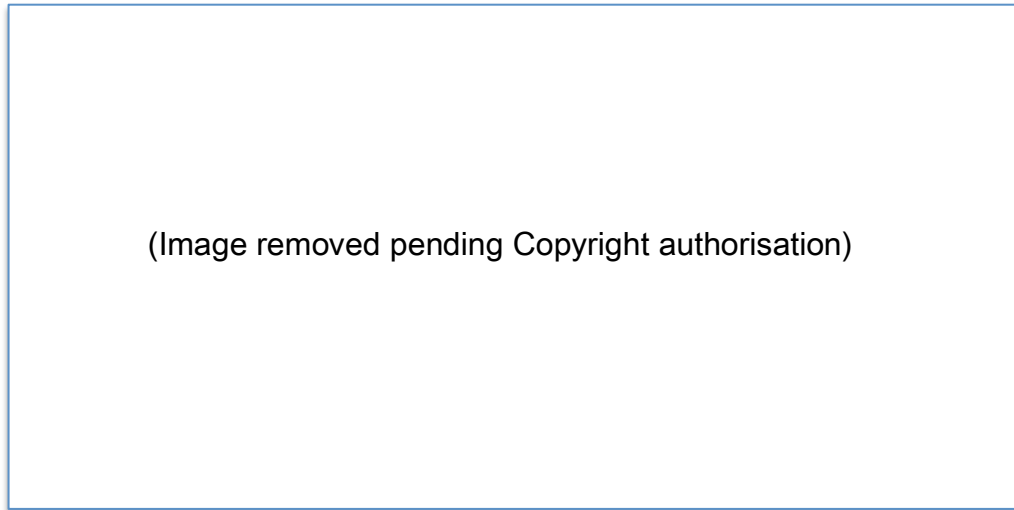


Figure 4. Triadic Model of Inference.

Image based on Eco (1986) *Semiotics and The Philosophy of Language*, 40.

Abduction is the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea; for induction does nothing but determine a value, and deduction merely evolves the necessary consequences of a pure hypothesis (Peirce in Hoffman M. 2010, 2).

Abductive reasoning is something we tend to do instinctively when we are looking for an explanation. Studies on abductive reasoning indicate its usefulness in communication, meaning making, and learning (Arrighi and Ferrario 2008; Ross and Shank 1993; Shank and Cunningham 1996; Shank 1998). The TS intends to develop an awareness of this type of reasoning. Although all the modes of inference are used, fostering the use of abduction in order to gain 'abductive insight' is one of the key characteristics of the TS (Hoffman, M. 2010, 3).

I anticipate that the repeated use of the semiotic tools could familiarise users with their contextual application. Similarly, the analyses of texts could allow

individuals to master patterns of deduction, induction, and abduction. This would indicate that the recursive use of Semiotics to interpret signs and derive meaning could foster the individual's critical and creative thinking skills. Further research into the implementation of the TS is required.

TS Conceptualization

The TS tools stem from different disciplines and are bound to include existing techniques, theories, and constructs, which may prove helpful to users in search of solutions to issues arising from the analysis of texts. The value of the tools is determined by their usefulness and relevance in the moment.

The possible combinations of tools to be used in any given moment are not limited. Users could test new combinations of tools, discover new uses for the existing tools or include new tools. Hence, this not only implies the inclusion of tools not yet defined or determined, but also, the ability to remove tools that are no longer required; as we do with any text.

Tool Layout

For the sake of clarity, I propose a tool layout to illustrate what can be included in the TS [See Figure 5]. In this layout the tools are classified in reference to Heidegger's causality principle, explained in *The Question Concerning Technology*, in which he refers to the [efficient,] formal, material, and teleological causes (1977, 6). The TS comprises a Formal Toolbox and a Material Toolbox. Each toolbox contains formal tools and material tools respectively. The fourth cause [the efficient cause or agent] is the user of the TS. As the designer of the TS system, I too am an agent. The teleological cause is the trigger for the agent to use the toolbox tools in a process of cultivation.

The Toolbox layout is meant as a representation, intended to produce clarity about the levels at which the TS system can operate. However, in reality there is

no levelled pattern procedure. These levels are not hierarchical or lineal; the process does not occur in stages or sequentially. Rather, the TS system operates according to patterns of self-organization with infinite possibilities of combinations between toolboxes and tools.

Additionally, the cause-and-effect framework is also a representation for the sake of coherence. The tools are not restrained to their represented classification. Tools that may appear in one moment, at a particular level, can re-appear, and be used, as part of another level. For example, the use of a video and Semiotics [material] to consider thinking patterns [formal] can have the final purpose of developing other-awareness [teleological]. In another moment, other-awareness, can be used as formal in the analysis of the same video [material] to foster empathy [teleological].

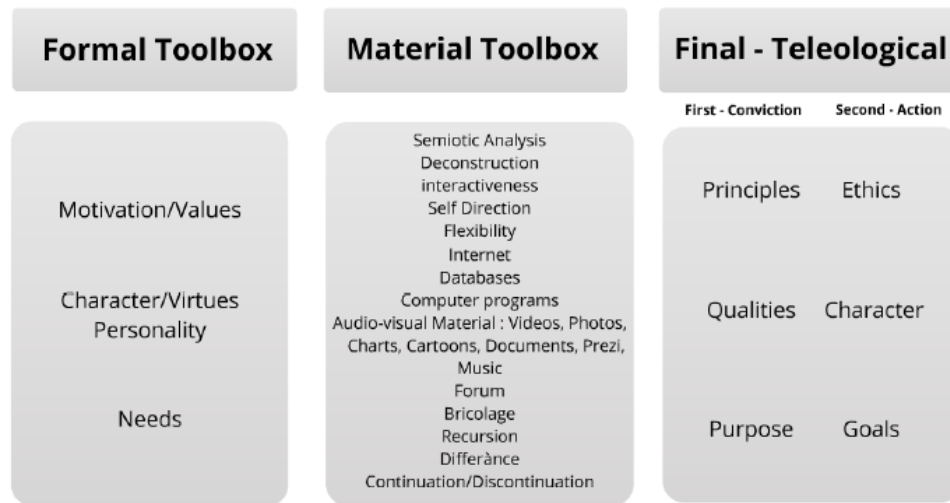
The TS is operative at three levels: Individual, Social, and Transcendent. When I speak of levels, I refer to the classification of the types of tools according to the type of awareness they foster, regardless of their causality classification. Some tools will overlap, as they can be used in several levels.

The Individual Level

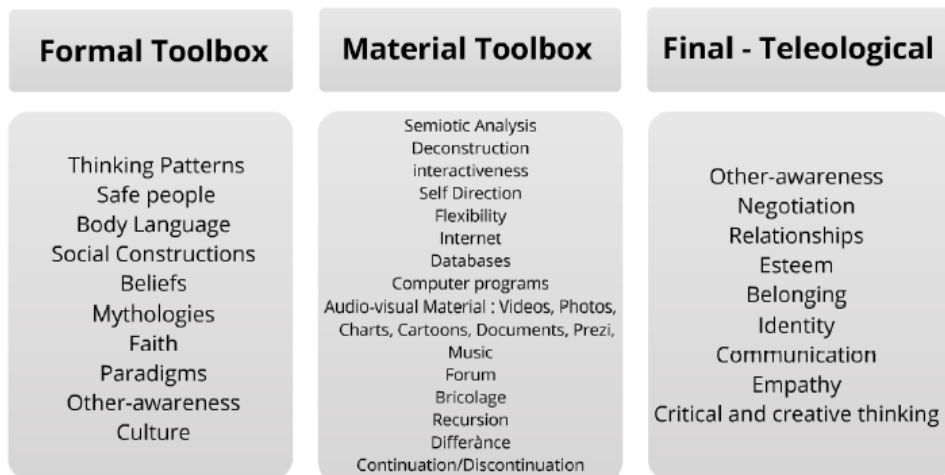
The individual level tools are chosen for their capacity to foster awareness of an individual's convictions at the most basic level. This level must, as a rule, include tools that aim to bring clarity and serve as a guide for the individual to establish principles, recognise potentials, and determine purpose. Examples include tools such as human needs (Maslow 1943), motivational values (Schwartz 2006; 2009), character strengths and virtues (VIA Classification of Character) (Peterson and Seligman 2004). Additionally, abstract concepts that clarify principles, such as moderation and boundaries could also be included (Cloud and Townsend 1992).

TS Toolbox Tools and Final Causes

Individual Level



Social Level



Transcendent Level

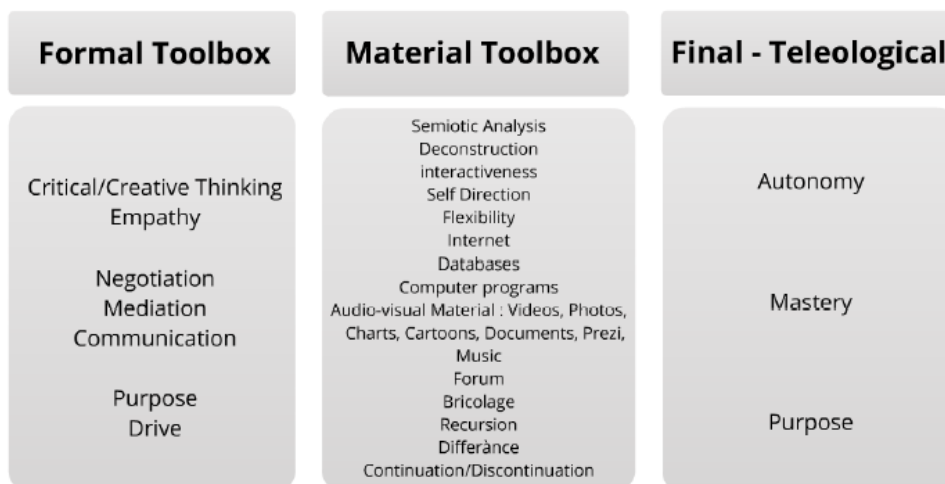


Figure 5. TS Toolbox Tools and Final Causes.

The Social Level

The social level includes tools for the interpretation of the objectified world. That is, the world as it presents itself to us, and as we perceive it. This level includes tools for evaluation and interpretation, such as thinking patterns (Ashfield 2007, 18-19), body language (Ekman 2003, Navarro and Karlins 2008), media literacy (Gaines 2010), social constructions, mythologies (Barthes 1972), and the like. Additionally, it should include tools that develop social skills. Some examples include resources to develop negotiation, communication, and conflict resolution skills.

The Transcendent Level

The transcendent level includes tools that enable the expression of the inner self into the objectified world. This level allows for the combination of tools from the other toolboxes in order to pursue transcendence. Examples include tools to foster autonomy, and purpose (Pink 2009), empathy (Rifkin 2009). The technology is designed so that the process is recursive. The teleological is continually at the service of the users. This allows the users to deconstruct, reconstruct, recycle and defer a variety of paradigms of actuality using the TS tools. In this sense, the users play a pivotal role in the process of causality of the TS, precisely because it involves their own perceptions and interpretations of self and actuality.

Tools as Paradigms

A worldview is a conceptual scheme, by which we consciously or unconsciously place what we believe, and use to interpret and judge actuality (Nash 1992, 16). An individual's worldview includes their conception of actuality, as well as the paradigms used in the interpretation of their personal perceptions, such as needs, values, beliefs [convictions]. These belong to the category of internal identity [as noted above]. The worldview also includes shared paradigms such

as culture, social constructions, codes of behaviour, rules and regulations, theories, and the like. These belong to the external identity and represent [or at least they ought to], the combination of agreements that are part of the shared culture. Every individual contributes to the culture through their self-characterisations, which are meant to stem from the cultivation of their internal identity.

Gaining awareness of our worldview enhances self-understanding (Ibid). Similarly, understanding other worldviews is key to 'empathic sensitivity' (Rifkin 2010, 2). In turn, empathy not only plays a significant role in the development of the psyche and selfhood (Fairbairn cited in Rifkin 2009, 60), its absence has dire consequences for the formation of the ego (Kohut cited in Rifkin 2009, 60).

The TS toolboxes contain tools to examine re-presentations of life. The tools introduce paradigms to the reader as opportunities to evaluate worldviews. The paradigms can include theories, abstract concepts, belief systems, cultural codes, social constructs, and the like. The paradigms are introduced during recursions. Recursion enables the framing of the process of 'continuation' and 'discontinuation' (Van Osselaer 2001). It acts as a binder during continuation, enabling the connection to past interpretations in the moment. When new paradigms are introduced (discontinuation), new meanings stand by in reserve, to be recalled during the next recursion. This creates the potential for new meanings to emerge and evolve, as the reader makes sense of the texts (Ibid). The process holds a certain resemblance to the process described in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory (ZPD) by which individuals on the edge of learning a new concept or task benefit from interactions (Cited in Mooney 2006, 83).

The User or Agent

First, [there is] a *dis-covering* user, who navigates the content of the TS with the intention of developing media literacy, critical thinking skills, self-awareness,

self-actualization, and empathy. The use of 'dis-cover' incorporates connotations such as finding, realizing, and learning with inventing, conceiving, and developing, all of which are key to the TS design strategy and purpose.

Then, there is a *delivering* user, who uses the TS to assist others in their development of self-awareness and other-awareness. Examples of a delivering user can include a teacher or a therapist. A delivering user could potentially use the TS to focus on a specific topic such as bullying, body image, relationships, and the like. However, a description and further exploration of the ways in which this can occur cannot be addressed in this document.

The prospect of a delivering user imposes a bifurcation of the discovering user. Consequently, the discovering user has two positions: The *independent* discovering user, who navigates the TS unassisted, and the *assisted* discovering user, who is assisted when navigating through the TS, by a delivering user.

TS Navigation

The toolbox is intended to be dynamic, interactive and scalable. The starting point is not fixed. The user can navigate choosing tools, scenarios, or topics as starting points. This means the particular order in which the toolbox can be navigated cannot be controlled. Rather, the navigation of the toolbox is determined by the actuality demands of the user.

The layout is designed to allow individual several path choices. A fully functional version would allow individuals to navigate the program freely, using hyperlinks to engage in semiotic analysis or in the evaluation/application of tools. The user can choose between topics, media [video, art, cartoon, photos], or tools.

Because the tools are of different varieties, and there is freedom to navigate through them –as determined by choice, the effect is that the different levels [individual, social, and transcendent] are worked on simultaneously.

The bifurcations are not fixed. The sequence is predicated on the interaction of the user (agent/efficient) with the actuality, using tools (material) in the moment (involving a teleology) according to experience (formal). This also means that every instance of the use of the toolbox will be different.

Methodology

The TS uses Semiotics as a system to create a context in which the tools are introduced. As mentioned above, the texts are re-presentations including videos, cartoons, photographs, and the like.

These re-presentations of actuality serve as scenarios that are detached from the user. That is, although the user may identify with the proxy [the character represented or the stereotype], the re-presentations do not include individuals who are part of the user's day-to-day relations, such as friends or family. This creates a space of separation, where the user as an objective observer, can test the tools made available to them through the TS. However, because the user will always interpret the scenarios in light of their own past interpretations, in an indirect manner, they place themselves within the context of the scenario at the moment of interpretation. For example, an individual could recall a similar experience, identify with one of the characters, or have seen the text before; in which case, that experience [text and context], will influence their interpretation. This positioning of the user creates a personal context for them to evaluate their interpretations in the moment.

The process begins with the individual making a selection from the toolbox. After their initial selection, the individual will be guided through a brief process of deconstruction of the text [offered as multiple selection], followed by the identification of the codes used to create the message [paradigms; worldviews]. After deconstruction, new paradigms [tools including codes, concepts, theories,

and the like] are introduced to trigger a new interpretation process [several paradigms would be available to choose from].

The tools can belong to any of the levels shown in the toolbox layout. Every change in perspective introduced by a tool is considered in light of the initial text. This triggers the process of abduction. At this point, it is expected that the individual has broadened their understanding of the text. Additionally, the individuals will have had the opportunity to identify their own worldview or paradigms in relation to the text.

I have attempted to provide evidence of this process in the samples. The electronic copy is dynamic and should be the first the reader engages with. In fact, the hard copy is only provided as reference to the digital copy.

Conclusion

The TS aims to provide tools that enhance its users' ability to understand texts, enabling them to critically and creatively evaluate their actualities. It enables the consideration of worldviews, using a set of semiotic tools to analyse texts. Consequently, the users will develop self-awareness and other-awareness, enhancing their capacity to communicate, relate to others, negotiate, and mediate.

I expect the development of self-awareness and other-awareness to trigger cultivation and individuality, strengthening identity. The pursuit of cultivation and individuality should foster an active engagement in the creation of culture, rather than passive consumption of knowledge or trend following. As a final result, the TS users will develop awareness and understanding, which will facilitate and enhance the individual's capacity to become self-actualised and to transcend with empathy.

I have outlined the purposes of the TS and its methodology, including the use of semiotics and complexure as key communication tools. Additionally, in the samples, I have highlighted some of the ways in which technology is changing the environment, as well as the need to anticipate where we are headed. In this regard, I have indicated the role of the TS in addressing the expected demands of the future.

Individuals are responsible for their cultivation of identity. The TS Thesis has been an attempt to indicate the potential of the TS to trigger the process. As far as conclusions go, the cultivation process itself does not conclude, it is ongoing. It is also potentially in *dis*-use, blurred out by the constant flux of everyday life.

The real conclusion, if there is to be one, is associated with the determination to enable the pursuit of cultivation and individuality as defined in the TS. To this effect, this is not an end. The process has just begun; this thesis is a sign.

TS Sample Materials

Sample 1

Toolbox System Prezi Presentation 1: "Life is a Text."

"At a point of departure into a series of texts, meanings become part of sense with a reading. In sense, meanings stand as a residue of interpretations gone by. What if sense was a sequence of meanings that emerge by the recursive use of what happens to be read, when the feedback about text is provided to and with the moment?" [Complexure] (Van Osselaer 2001, 2).

This fragment belongs to a thesis on the potential of Complexure. Van Osselaer's thesis proposes Complexure as a set of tools to catalyze the emergence of meanings through recursive readings (Van Osselaer 2001, 7). The question posed by Van Osselaer, challenges the simplistic explanation of the role of the text as an instrument for the writer to communicate, and a sign for the reader to interpret.

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Life is a Text

Life is perceived.

Actuality is an individual's perception of the state of affairs as a picture of facts (Wittgenstein 1921, 2; 2.1).

Pictures of facts are texts.

An individual's actuality is a text to them.

Texts can exist in any medium.

For example, books, film, video, photographs, audio recordings, and the like, are all texts.

Texts are combinations of signs.

Anything can be a sign.

Nature, sounds, words, objects, body language can all be signs, if individuals interpret them to have some meaning (Peirce cited in Chandler 2009, par 1).

Meanings of signs are culturally formed.

Source and Place offer the two most distinct modes of what constitutes a sign. The following is an abstracted version of Peirce's semiotic triad (1955, par 3).

Source (Symbol): The sign itself, as it appears to the signifier.
Signified (Object): The object or concept.
The signifier/signified relation is the sign, but the signifier is dependent on the signified for its meaning.

Source (Symbol) is a sign itself.
The signifier/signified relation is the sign, but the signifier is dependent on the signified for its meaning.

l texts.

Saussure and Peirce offer the two most dominant models of what constitutes a sign. The following is an abbreviated version of Chandler's description of both models (2009, par 2).

is.

Saussure offered a 'dyadic' or two-part model of the sign:

Signifier (signifiant) - the form which the sign takes.

Signified (signifié) - the concept it represents.

The relationship between the signifier and the signified is dependent on social and cultural conventions.

Peirce offered a triadic model:

Representamen: the form the sign takes (not necessarily material).

Interpretant: not an interpreter, but rather, the sense made of the sign.

Object: to which the sign refers.

s. body language

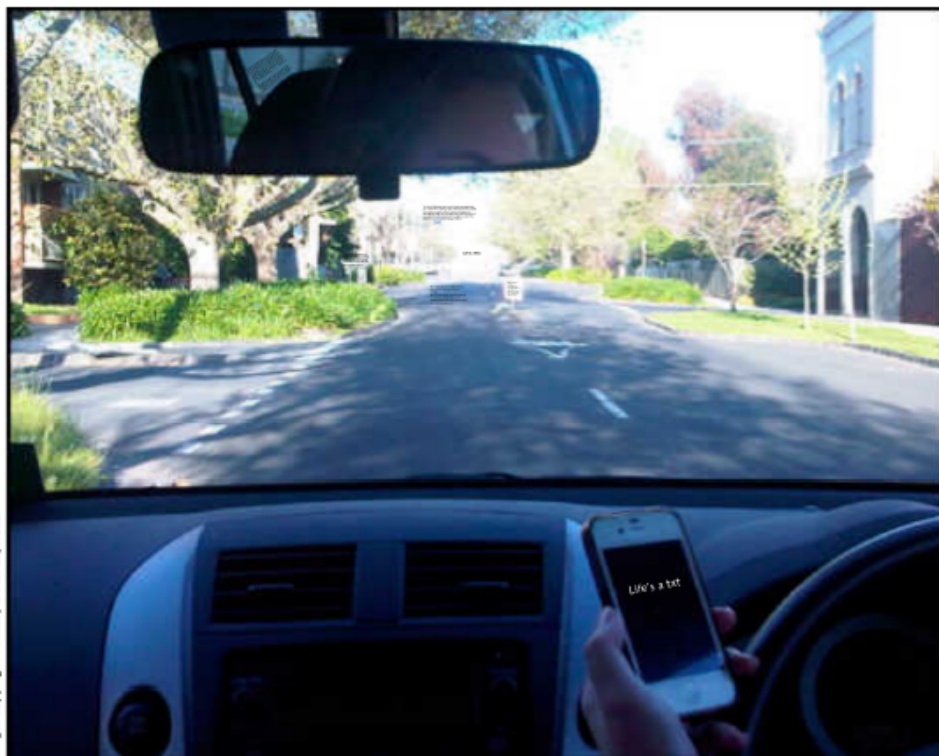


Image: Copyright Mithazay De La Esprilla

The image positions the viewer inside of a car, in the back seat.

From there, we see the dashboard of the car, the steering wheel and a hand holding a mobile phone.

We also see a rear-view mirror, in it, the reflection of the driver's head.

We see the windscreen, and through it, a road with trees and houses on the side [a suburb]. It is a sunny day.

The driver is using a mobile phone whilst driving the car.

The driver drives on the left side of the road

A caption reads: Life's a Txt.



The caption can have at least two meanings. First, that people spend their life reading and sending text messages; they live for texting. Second, that life hangs in the balance of texting. In other words, that the importance of life is reduced to the text the driver is receiving. Presumably, the text is more important than life, as the driver willingly puts their life [and that of the viewer, who is in the back seat] at risk, by driving and texting at the same time.

We could conclude, that the driver, who controls the car and the destination [the viewer is not in control], is in turn controlled by the technology. That is, the driver is not fully in control of either technology [the car or the phone]. From the perspective of the viewer, the person in the back seat has even less control.

The caption, using an abbreviated form of communication that is not uncommon for text messages, is meant to read 'life is a text'. This may further serve to reinforce the sense that life is brief, that there is not enough time.

This image, in combination with the information that preceded it in this document, also reinforces the notion that our perceptions are texts that can be interpreted [just as we have interpreted the photo]. This may serve as an indication of the intentions of the writer.





"Electric circuitry profoundly involves men with one another. Information pours upon us, instantaneously and continuously. As soon as information is acquired, it is very rapidly replaced by still newer information. Our electrically-configured world has forced us to move from the habit of data classification to the mode of pattern recognition. We can no longer build serially, block-by-block, step-by-step, because instant communication insures that all factors of the environment and of experience coexist in a state of active interplay" (McLuhan 1967, 63).

(Image removed pending Copyright authorisation)

Content: logos of popular social media sites

It was 1967 when McLuhan wrote the passage above. He was contemplating actuality, anticipating where things would go. It is as if he had predicted the effects the acceleration of technology, 'Dromology' in Virilio's terms, would have on culture (1977).

(Image removed pending Copyright authorisation)

Content: Side road warning sign, bold red letters on a white background. Reads: BE AWARE OF INVISIBILITY.

Thomas Eriksen notes, that as the speed of the technology allows an increase in the flow of information [signs, texts] we are exposed to, 'the span of attention necessarily decreases'; as a result, 'context and understanding' are lost (2001, 69-70).

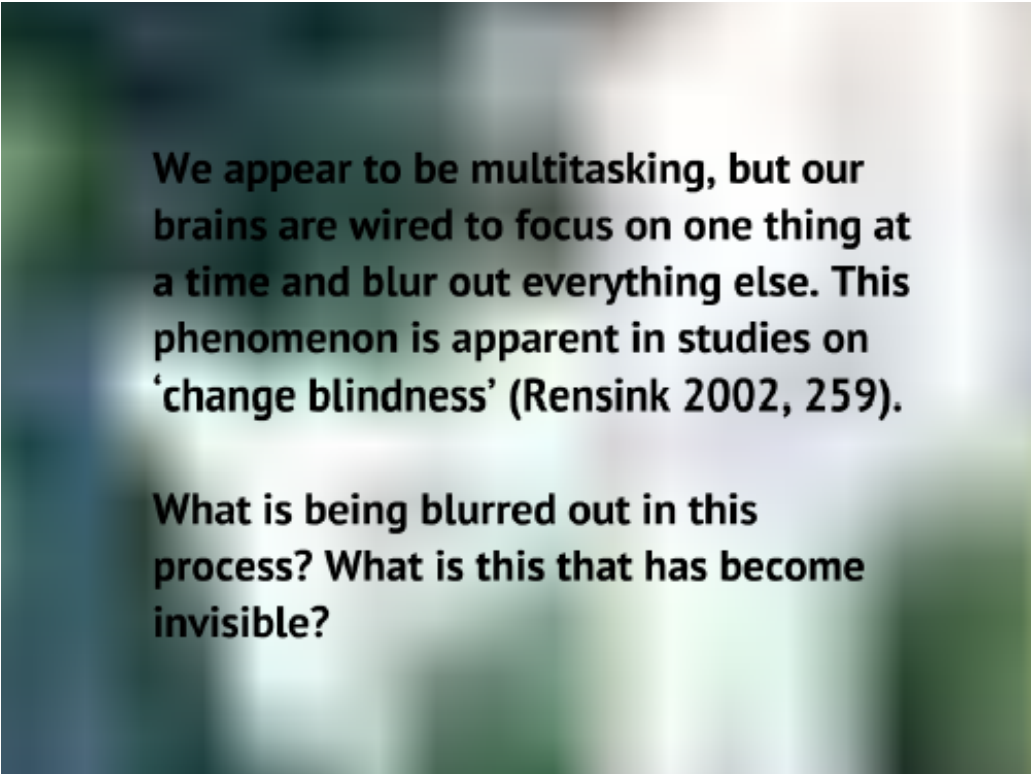
"Every waking moment of contemporary life seems to be impacted by experiences that require the interpretation of signs taken to be messages from the environment, other people or media. And while we are busy interpreting necessary information, the processes of communication and the media are in the background. Those processes have significant effects on the interpretation of meanings" (Gaines 2010, 5).

Relationships, the use of time, the ways in which we come across and process knowledge, are all affected by the technologies we use. In turn, these changes in the environment cause **culture changes, affecting the ways that life presents itself before us, and thus, the ways we **self-perceive** and **self-characterize**.**

(Image removed pending Copyright authorisation)

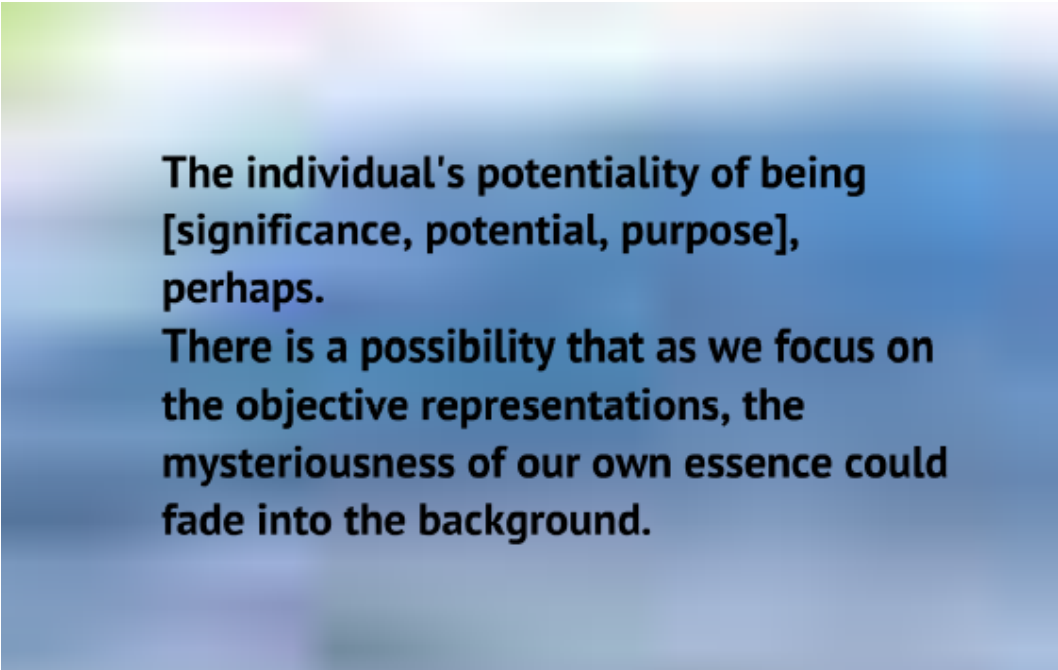
Content: As previous

In this context, the photo could be interpreted to re-present a call to become aware of those signs that have faded into the background. That is, the everyday things, which influence our perceptions of actuality, our sense and meaning making, and our worldviews.



We appear to be multitasking, but our brains are wired to focus on one thing at a time and blur out everything else. This phenomenon is apparent in studies on 'change blindness' (Rensink 2002, 259).

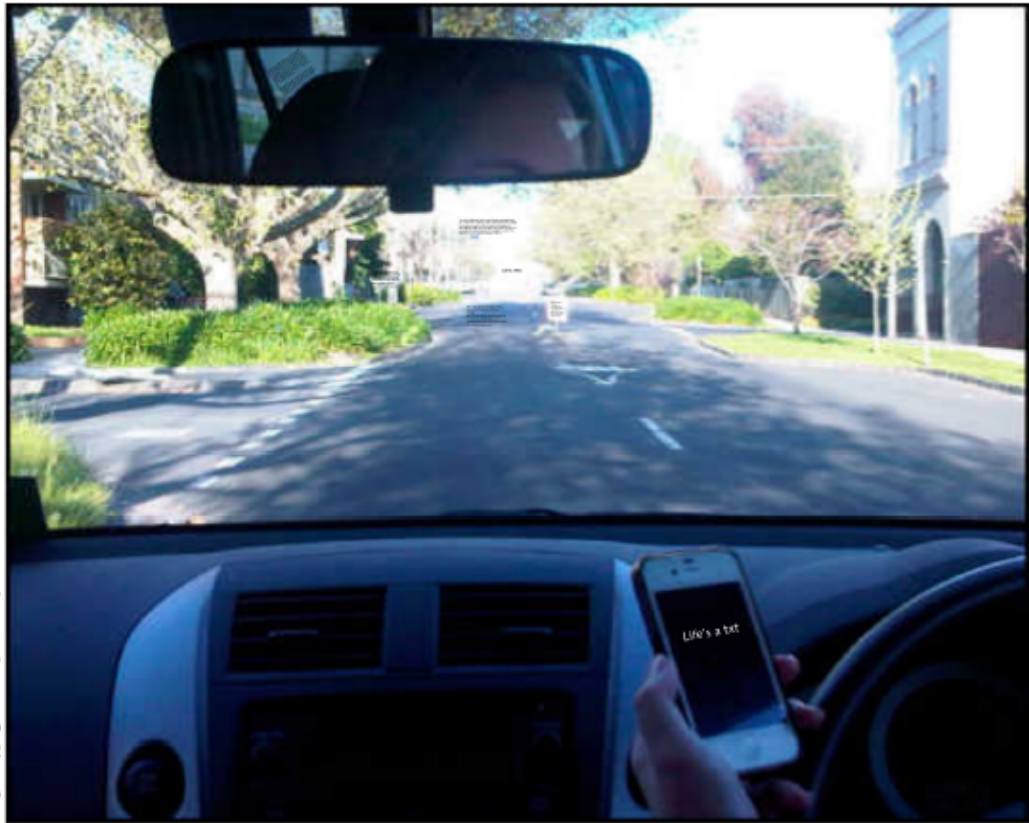
What is being blurred out in this process? What is this that has become invisible?



The individual's potentiality of being [significance, potential, purpose], perhaps.

There is a possibility that as we focus on the objective representations, the mysteriousness of our own essence could fade into the background.

Image: Copyright Mithazay De La Esparrella



The speed of the technology has allowed us to be in constant contact with each other; the perceptions of time and space have forever changed. However, we are constantly filling every gap. We, check our e-mails as we watch television, read texts as we walk the dog... or as we drive. The effect is that although individuals are physically present, they become psychologically absent. Their surroundings blur into the background becoming somewhat invisible. Those surrounding them, experience a form of unresolved grief known as **ambiguous loss** (Boss 1999, 8).

A type of loss that is not clear-cut, as opposed to a loss that is definite, such as one associated with death. In this loss, the individual cannot begin the healing process because there is no closure. Therefore, the grief is ongoing with no clear end in sight. There are two basic kinds of ambiguous loss: Physically absent but psychologically present: as in cases of missing soldiers, kidnapped children, the relatives of immigrants, and the like; other cases may include separation caused by divorce or adoptions. Psychologically absent but physically present: as in those with Alzheimer's disease, addictions, and other chronic mental illnesses; serious head trauma, comas, and in more everyday situations, people excessively preoccupied with work, with technology such as video games, Internet, and the like (Boss 1999, 8).

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This psychological absence is a state of mindlessness [defined in opposition to 'mindfulness'] that may result in a loss of the sense of identity, low self-esteem, lack of purpose, diminished creativity, stress, depression, the list goes on (Garland 2007; Kiken & Shook 2011).

In 1967 Marshall McLuhan wrote

"The past went that-a-way. When faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavour of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march Backwards into the future." (1967, 75).

(Image removed pending Copyright authorisation)

Content: Image in sepia tones. Interior view of a car windscreen. Car is speeding fast through a tunnel at night. A silhouette of a carriage and horses appears on the rear view mirror.

(Image removed pending Copyright authorisation)

Content: As previous

McLuhan's text addresses change and the struggle to break away from past forms. The text is a fragment from his book *The Medium is The Message*, addressing the notion of getting ahead of the technologies that surround us, to anticipate where they will lead.

As the environments in which we find ourselves are affected by technology, changes occur, and it becomes necessary for those who can see them clearly to highlight that which is not visible to others (1967, 88). McLuhan's text is relevant because the technological changes of our times have created a change in the environment, in the ways in which we communicate and perceive. As brilliantly exemplified by Nicholas Carr's book *The Shallows*, even the ways we use our brain to read, think and remember, are changing due to the technology (2010).

The windscreen of a car.
Blurred lines indicating movement, most likely forward; speed.
The car is possibly going through a tunnel.
The lights of an oncoming vehicle also blurred; possibly a truck.

In the rearview mirror a carriage pulled by horses.
The contrast of past present.
Two modes of transportation, two different types of technology.

The viewer is in the car.
The viewer is the driver? ...Perhaps.

The viewer is in the present moment and has two views available:
The windscreen representing the future; what lies ahead.
The rearview mirror representing the past; what is left behind.

The Text and the Photo both belong to the book *The Medium is the Message* (McLuhan and Fiore 1967, 74-75). In the written text, and the photograph that illustrates it, McLuhan refers to the changing of modes of communication in the electronic era. They bring forth the idea of suspending the re-call of past interpretations when we interpret technology as a sign. In other words, to interpret today's technology, we cannot draw from interpretations of past technologies. In order to anticipate the future, we must assess the potentiality of technology by making it strange and looking closely at it in the moment.

(Image removed pending Copyright authorisation)

Content: As previous

The technology has enabled the establishment of a global community. Individuals share knowledge and expertise freely, on a day-to-day basis, as used to occur in the local villages. For example, YouTube videos allow individuals to access a piano lesson online. Not only is it accessible, it is also immediate; it would have taken days, perhaps weeks, to organize a piano lesson in the past.

The current cyber-technology not only provides speed of communication, it enables any individual to produce media. The media produced through Facebook, Tumblr, YouTube, and the like, are characterizations informing worldviews.

Individuals negotiate and construct a personal identity based on shared characteristics, affinities, and differences; representations embedded in media can have significant influence (Gaines 2010, 26). We must not ignore the power of the re-'presentations of self' enabled, for example, through the creation of online profiles and media (Goffman 1959).

Each individual plays a key collaborative role in the establishment of culture. There is a demand to actively participate in the process of sense and meaning making of our lives, and in relation to others, with awareness. To be sure, in the current environment, the boundaries between the private and the public have blurred. However, the fact still remains, each one is a unique individual, potentially fulfilled through 'cultivation' (Simmel 2000, 56).

"Scientists make their discoveries as 'artists,' not specialists. Such scientists construct experiments as 'works of art' to probe the environment. But anyone with enough vitality to confront the actual through direct perception can predict the future by noting what has already happened. For the future of the **future is the present." (Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan 2011, 55-56).**



Sample 2

Toolbox System Prezi Presentation 2: “Cyber-Actuality.”

The Big Bang Theory

**Series 4
Episode 19**

**“The Zarnecki Incursion”
(Chuck Lorre Productions 2010)**

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What just happened?

Signs and Symbols

Meaning

Sheldon screaming in despair = something has happened.

Leonard speeds up his pace = he becomes concerned.

Sheldon holding a paper bag to his face, breathing irregularly = panic attack, its a crisis bigger than we expected.

Policeman = Authority, security, safety, law.

persuasion

Audience laughter in background is used as a trigger to get us to laugh, anticipating the absurdity.

Assumptions

something accepted as true

stereotypes, codes of cultural values and beliefs

Challenge **assumptions**, determine **conviction**

Character Qualities

We are familiar with Sheldon's nature, **character** and personality. We expect something absurd to be going on.

His character is a **stereotype** of a highly intelligent, scientifically and logically minded individual, with poor social skills and childish behaviour.

A policeman is a **sign** of authority.
The policeman says to Leonard:
"Your friend here called 911 to report a robbery."
The derision in his tone, indicates that he is not taking Sheldon seriously.

The context is set up so that we do not take Sheldon's opinions seriously.

Therefore, we are prepared to dismiss his actions and words.

The Issue

Rationality/Irrationality

Belief/Disbelief

Tangible/Virtual

Sheldon:
"Why hast thou forsaken me, oh deity whose existence I doubt?"
Paradox:
Sheldon refuses to believe in God, yet he is beside himself over the loss of cyber-property, which only exists virtually.

Sheldon:

"Why hast thou forsaken me, oh deity whose existence I doubt?"

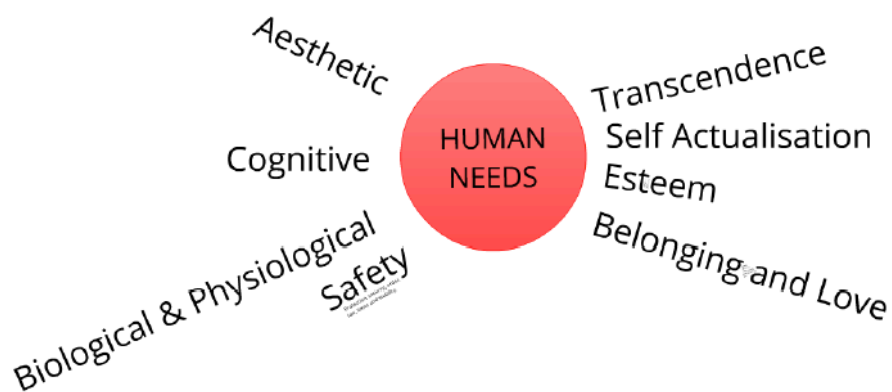
Paradox:

Sheldon refuses to believe in God, yet he is beside himself over the loss of cyber-property, which only exists virtually.

However, Sheldon always has a logic to his reasoning.

There is something else at stake.
Where is the logic in what he is saying?

Sheldon's security is threatened. Whether what he owned was real or virtual is irrelevant.



Adaptation based on A. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943; 1968).

Psychological

Safety

Protection, security, order,
law, limits and stability.

MOTIVATIONAL VALUES

Openness to Change

Self-Transcendence



Self-Enhancement

Conservation

Schwartz's Motivational Values (1996; 2006)

Security

Safety, Harmony and stability of society, of relationships and of the self. Family Security, national security, social order, cleanliness, reciprocation of favours, sense of belonging, and being healthy.

Sheldon:

"They took my battle ostrich ...
The only bird I ever loved."

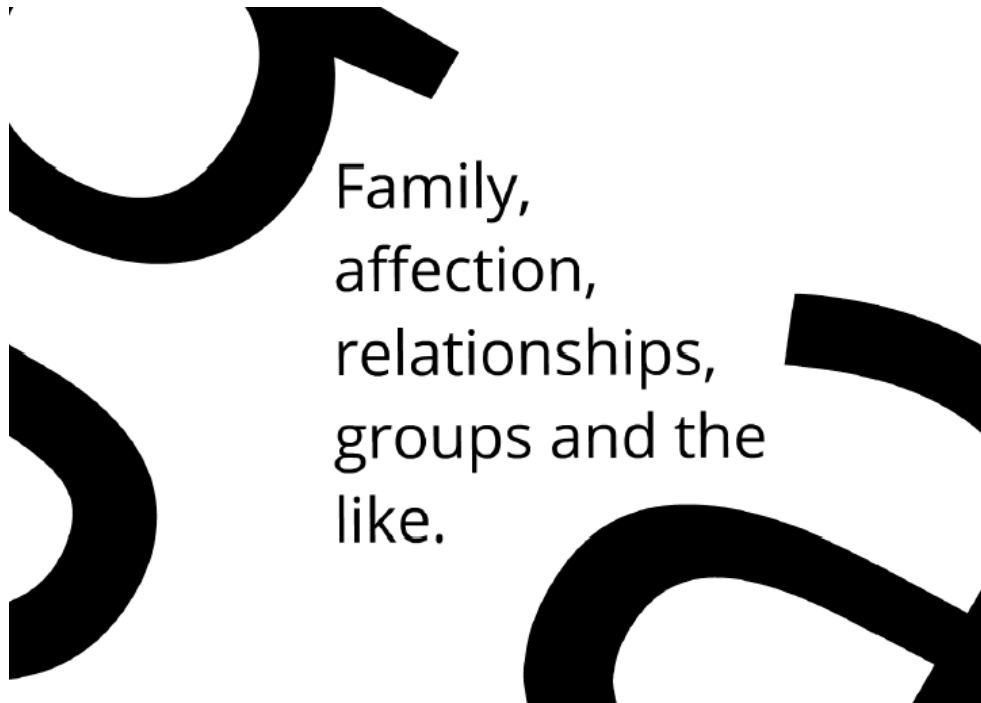
Sign of attachment.



Adaptation based on A. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943; 1968).

Self-
Esteem

Belonging and Love



Sheldon has lost his sense of privacy and protection.

In Sheldon's logical thinking any threat to safety and security should be dealt with by the police.

Universalism

Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, protection for the welfare of all people and of nature. Unity with nature, protecting the environment, desire for a world at peace and a world of beauty.

Qualities:

Broadminded, wisdom, social justice, equality.

The policeman is not taking Sheldon seriously.

Dealing with the policeman becomes a power battle.

Openness to Change

Self-Transcendence



Self-Enhancement

Conservation

Schwartz's Motivational Values (1996; 2006)

In this case, power and achievement values enter in conflict with universalism.

Power

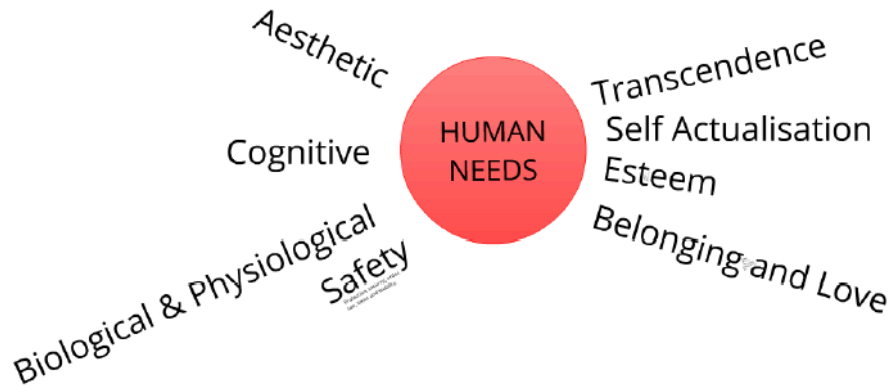
Social status and prestige, control and dominance over people and resources. Social power, authority, wealth, preserving public image and social recognition.

The policeman stands
with his arms on his hips,
holding the holster of his gun.

Sheldon sees he is not taken
seriously and demands to be
called 'Doctor Sheldon'.

Achievement

Personal success, through demonstrating competence according to social standards. Success, capacity, ambition, influence, intelligence, and self-respect.

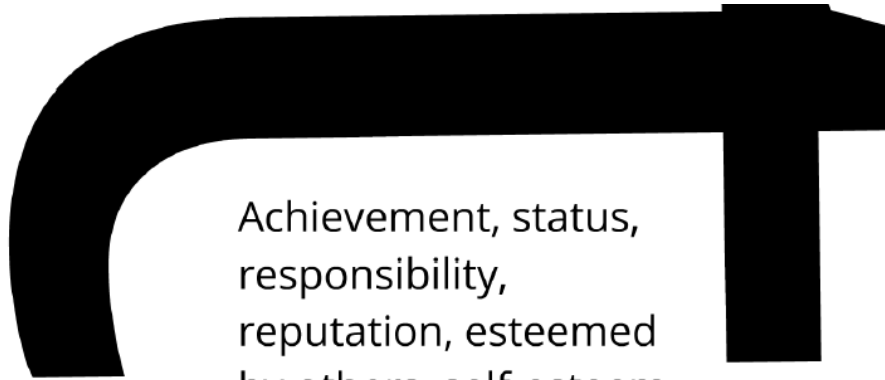


Adaptation based on A. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943; 1968).

5000

Esteem

5000



Achievement, status,
responsibility,
reputation, esteemed
by others, self-esteem



The characterisation of power
shifts, from power to enforce
the law, to knowledge as
power.

Sheldon Says: "That's from Avatar, World of Warcraft takes place in Azeroth. Goodness Gracious! How are you allowed to carry a gun?"

This is a direct challenge to the policeman's authority on the basis of Sheldon's Knowledge.

Further, Sheldon asks if the policeman can refer him to a rogue cop. This sends the message: "You have no power to help me."

ICON

A rogue police officer is a known movie icon of justice when the system fails.

The virtual reality of gaming, as well as the rogue police officer icon, are social constructions.

It is all very absurd.

Sheldon fails to express what the real issue is.

Everything he says is dismissed

persuasion

Audience laughter in background is used as a trigger to get us to laugh anticipating the absurdity.

It distracts us from thinking critically about the issue.

That is the point of the program: to entertain us and make us laugh.

However...

THE UNINTENDED MESSAGE

Do not talk to anyone about cyber-bullying, cyber-theft, invasion of privacy, internet safety and security because:

- You will be ridiculed.
- It is virtual, not real.
Therefore, not worth the effort.
- There is nothing the police can do in regards to your security.

	Motivations	Needs
Policeman	Universalism Power	Esteem
Sheldon	security power achievement	Safety Esteem Belonging

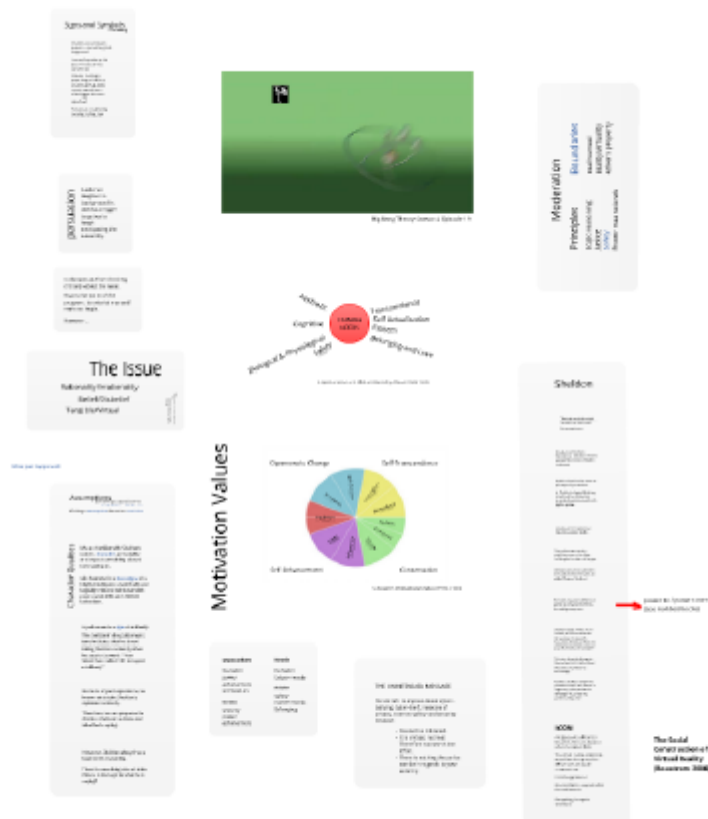


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